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ABSTRACT

The concept of barrier-free transfer from two-year to four-year colleges is an important element in planning for student access to the baccalaureate. While it seems clear that transfer works reasonably well for most students most of the time, evidence suggests that transfer may be a qualitatively and quantitatively different experience at the relatively small number of two-year institutions attended by most minority students. Two-year colleges can provide open access and accept that many of their poorly prepared students will not qualify to transfer or graduate, or they can achieve good completion rates by restricting access to their high-demand programs to traditionally prepared majority and minority students. A third alternative involves assessing the preparation of entering students and providing them with learning strategies and support services necessary to gain college-level content and literacy skills. Changing demographics suggest that institutions must strive for both access and high achievement for all students. In a growing number of states, it is a priority for all postsecondary institutions to work toward the elimination of race and ethnicity as influences on both participation and graduation rates. This goal can be fostered through active recruitment of first-generation underprepared students, collaboration with high schools, early identification of gaps in academic preparation, intrusive advising and mentoring, tutorial services, and career guidance. A definition of educational quality that accommodates the growing diversity of America's college-going population must also emphasize teaching and support strategies to promote comparable achievement among all races and ethnic groups. (AJL)

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SOLVING THE ACCESS/QUALITY PUZZLE IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

A KEYNOTE ADDRESS PREPARED FOR THE OHIO CONFERENCE ON ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Columbus, Ohio
October 19, 1988

by

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Tempe, Arizona

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Minorities are a growing part of the pool of 18 to 22 year old group from which colleges and universities have traditionally drawn the majority of their full time students. While high school graduation rates for minority students have increased significantly over the past 20 years, college participation rates for blacks and Hispanics peaked in the mid-1970's and have since declined. The baccalaureate degrees awarded to blacks have declined in absolute numbers since 1976 while Hispanics and American Indians continue to earn degrees in numbers well below their representation in the population (Mingle 1987; Wilson and Melendez 1987).

Blacks, Hispanics and American Indians, while underrepresented overall in higher education attend two-year colleges at levels close to their proportional representation in the population (21.2 percent in 1984). This is true in part because of the willingness of community and technical colleges to serve employed adult populations where minorities are only about half as likely as majorities to have earned a degree or certificate. They are seriously underepresented in four-year institutions (14.5 percent in 1984), where available statistics significantly understate the problem since blacks and Hispanics are concentrated in about 50 predominantly minority public institutions.

The problem might be less serious if minority students were distributed randomly among the universe of two-year colleges, but this is clearly not the case. Minority students are concentrated in a relatively small number of institutions where they are likely to comprise more than half of the total enrollment because of segregated residential patterns and the commuting nature of the institution (Gittell 1986, p.72-73). Blackwell (1982, p.37), a prominent black sociologist, worries that the rise of these new

predominantly minority institutions will "all but preclude transfer to upper-division universities" in part because of their vocational emphasis.

The opportunity to move among segments of higher education without having to repeat work previously mastered has been described as an important strength of American higher education in contrast to Western European nations where freedom of movement among institutions established for different purposes is severely restricted. The concept of barrier free transfer from two to four-year colleges is an important element in planning for access to the baccalaureate in states such as Florida where 76 percent of all minority students begin their education in a community college (Florida Board of Regents 1985), and in California where more than 50,000 students transfer annually from community colleges to public universities (California Postsecondary Commission, 1986).

While it seems clear that transfer works reasonably well for most students most of the time it is not so clear that it works well in the institutions where most minority students enroll. In fact available evidence suggests that transfer may be a qualitatively and quantitatively different experience in the two-year institutions attended by most minority students.some settings. UCLA receives most of its black transfer students not from the predominantly minority community colleges in the Los Angeles District but instead from predominantly white Santa Monica College (California Postsecondary Education Commission 1986).

For the past three years I've been part of a multicultural team of researchers studying ten predominantly white universities that are leaders in their respective states and in the nation in the production of baccalaureate degrees among blacks, Hispanics, or Native Americans (Richardson, Simmons & de los Santos 1987; Richardson & Skinner 1988). We have talked with state policy leaders, campus administrators, faculty members, and minority graduates. We have also talked with community leaders and representatives of public and parochial school systems. We have asked each group: "What accounts for the success of the minority students you serve?"; and "What have you learned from your experiences that might prove useful to other institutions?"

An important point of departure for this current study, funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education, was an earlier Ford Foundation study in which Bender and I chose community colleges in eight cities with high participation rates for minority students and asked each to identify the major public university to which a majority of their students transferred (Richardson & Bender 1987). In this study, which included Cuyahoga Community College and Cleveland State University, we examined the process of

transfer as well as the context for inter-institutional cooperation provided by state policies.

From the Ford study we learned were more about barriers than we did about facilitation. We also learned that two-year colleges were at least as much a part of the pipeline problem for minorities as they were a part of the solution. In most of the cities we visited minority students were less well represented among transfer cohorts than among community college students, and within community colleges minority students were not proportionately represented in high demand selective programs in the allied health and engineering related fields. One important conclusion growing out of both studies is the need to examine both participation and graduation rates in order to judge the quality of the educational opportunities an institution is providing to minority citizens as recognized by the Ohio Board of Regents in its recent policy statement on access and success (Ohio Board of Regents 1988).

Institutions can provide open access without having many of their less well prepared students qualify to transfer or graduate. Alternatively, institutions can achieve good completion rates by restricting access to their high demand programs to traditionally prepared majority and minority students. Changing demographics suggest that institutions must strive for both access and high achievement for all students if we are to remain economically competitive in an increasingly global economy. Is it possible? Can we have both access and quality?

We are part of a society that was once half free and half slave, then separate and unequal, and only very recently and somewhat timidly supportive, of equal opportunity defined as giving everyone the same right to fail. It is easy to forget that less than 25 years ago the Civil Rights Act of 1964 spelled out our commitments to minority citizens as a nation in contrast with Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka which simply told us what we could no longer do. In the society envisaged by the Civil Rights Act, as well as the one proposed by the Ohio Board of Regents, participation would be unrelated to race or ethnicity. But participation is only half of the equation. For participation to have meaning minorities must also earn degrees.

Proportional representation and comparable achievement are not difficult concepts to understand. Their attainment, however, relies on our ability to define quality so that it does not restrict access. And access must include quality for all students. If we accept the premise that quality and access are not mutually exclusive, we have no choice but to work toward the attainment of both. Traditional definitions of quality emphasize reputation and resources. Institutions exhibit quality according to these definitions to the extent that they have highly regarded and well-paid faculty, impressive physical plants, large

libraries, and students who achieve high scores on admissions exams. Historically, minority students have been poorly represented in such institutions. A more recent view of quality emphasizes talent development or value added (Astin 1985). According to this view, institutions exhibit quality to the extent that they help all of their students develop whatever talents they have to their fullest potential. Reputation and resource views of quality proceed from the assumption that quality and access are mutually exclusive. By contrast, value-added approaches operate from the premise that the two can be combined.

Community and technical colleges as open access institutions have embraced the talent development perspective because it gives them an opportunity to excel with the students they serve rather than condemning them for not attracting more students who possess at matriculation the preparation necessary to their success in college. But the value added perspective involves difficulties in defining and assessing the outcomes on which excellence should be judged. Statewide assessment procedures, such as those developed in New Jersey, Tennessee, Florida, and more recently in Texas, represent an attempt to respond to this issue. Quite clearly there are justifiable concerns about the diffusion of outcomes produced through leaving every institution free to develop talent to its own specifications. We have much to learn from our K-12 colleagues in this regard.

Since 1964 we have made remarkable strides in adapting to accommodate diversity. Our first strategies were oriented towards increasing participation without worrying very much about the consequences for achievement. The success of two-year colleges in extending educational opportunities has been undeniable. But the policy decision in some states to rely primarily on two-year colleges to provide access has brought problems along with the benefits.

New or expanding community colleges faced three choices in the late 60's. They could provide access to differentially prepared students without changing academic standards or teaching approaches. This choice produced high attrition rates. From a student perspective, the arrangement might be thought of as quality without success. In a second alternative, academic standards were adjusted downward except in high demand programs with licensure requirements where admission procedures or screening courses kept underprepared students out (Richardson, Fisk & Okun 1983). This second alternative might be labeled "success without quality."

The third and most recent alternative has involved assessing the preparation of entering students and providing them with learning strategies and support services necessary to a fair chance of achieving the content and literacy skills appropriate to a

college-educated person. Because community and technical colleges did not take very enthusiastically to the notion that they had leveled down content rather than leveling up students, even when confronted with evidence of the declining performance of graduates, states have increasingly moved to assess outcomes to ensure that learning does take place and that students leave their college experience with measurable competencies as well as a credential.

With the advent of assessment and developmental studies, two-year colleges have made great strides in promoting achievement for more diverse learners. During the same period, state policies have often permitted four-year institutions to largely avoid the adaptations in teaching and learning strategies that the two-year colleges have had to make. Four-year schools were thus able to pursue a vision of quality that was built on the systematic denial of access to some segments of the population.

Four-year institutions that bolster participation rates by waiving regular admission standards need to adapt their teaching and learning strategies to differentially prepared learners in the same way that many two-year colleges have already done. But four-year schools have had little incentive to engage in such adaptation as long as access was defined as the responsibility of two-year colleges and their graduation rates were not carefully scrutinized. Many of the problems plaguing the transfer function can be traced to a policy environment that permitted universities to preserve a traditional definition of quality that largely excluded diversity, while placing pressure on community colleges to redefine quality to accommodate diversity.

I do not mean to make four-year institutions the heavies in this presentation. Very clearly, four-year colleges and universities have followed state policy priorities in responding as they have done. But now, in a growing number of states, including Ohio, it is a system priority for <u>all</u> institutions to work toward the elimination of race and ethnicity as influences on both participation and graduation rates. Achieving this goal can be enhanced by a better understanding of the relationships between the characteristics of minority students and the strategies needed to help them.

The minority graduates we interviewed for the OERI study differed along a number of important dimensions. One large group consisted of well-prepared first and second generation students who never considered any alternative to college attendance following high school graduation. These students came from well integrated suburban schools, from private schools, and from selective urban public schools such as Cass Tech and Renaissance in Detroit, and the Bronx School of Science in New York City. They experienced essentially the same problems as their Anglo counterparts, aggravated in instances where their numbers were

small by feelings of marginality and cultural isolation. They were upset by the low expectations held for their performance by many majority faculty members and insulted by institutional prejudgments that people of color need special programs because they are underprepared. Institutions don't have to change their teaching and learning strategies to serve this group which is why they are so intensively recruited by four-year institutions. Very few of this group show up in two-year schools.

Four-year institutions cannot, however, achieve proportional representation by recruiting well prepared minority students because there are not enough to go around. They must also find ways of including first generation underprepared students who attend predominantly minority schools where available courses and the rigor of academic competition leave them with gaps in content and skills. Because they know few adults who have been to college, they are not prepared for the demands they encounter in managing time and financial resources. Their lack of contact with college-educated professionals other than teachers also leave them with nonspecific educational objectives and an inadequate understanding of the relationship between higher education and career goals.

This group needs inter-institutional cooperation as well as comprehensive and systematic programming within each institution they experience in their upward climb. First generation students are uncertain climbers and they need solid ladders with every rung in place. The first rung is K-12 college collaboration and the earlier it begins, the better. Schools that serve minority populations typically confront an enormous range of learning problems with fewer resources than their more affluent suburban counterparts. These schools need enrichment experiences for their students, staff development for their teachers and administrators, and motivational opportunities that demystify college for their students and help them see higher education as possible. Helping them is complicated by the fact that their administrators are often skeptical about cooperating with colleges and universities partly because of distrust about motives and the lack of relevance of much of their own professional training. Their reserve can be overcome by involving them as full partners in the design of collaboration activities.

Examples of successful collaboration with school districts enrolling high proportions of minority students include the principal's institute developed by UCLA and the Los Angeles Unified School District, the elementary school adoption program of Shelby State Community College in Memphis and LaGuardia Community College's widely respected middle college high school. Beyond collaboration to expand the pool of prepared and marginally underprepared students, colleges and universities can help the marginally underprepared by easing the transition from

high school to college. Summer bridge programs, special orientation sessions, outreach efforts that involve parents and assist in the completion of financial aid and admission forms and the articulation of competencies taught in high school courses with those expected in college freshman classes all help students develop the competencies and build the networks essential to college success.

A third rung involves identifying preparation gaps before students are placed in classes that anticipate skills they don't have. Intrusive advising and mentoring constitute a fourth rung. Tutorial services and learning laboratories represent a fifth. Career guidance is also important. It is not enough to do some of these things; they must all take place or students fall through the missing spaces. None of these strategies are race or ethnicity specific, although all will help minority students disproportionately as encouraged in the Ohio Board of Regents (1988) statement because there are proportionately more minority students who are likely to fail without these forms of assistance.

Many of the strategies I have described are already in operation in a growing number of two- and four-year institutions. They provide access with quality for students whose freedom from jobs and families make the traditional mode of college attendance feasible. The problem with relying on recent high school graduates to achieve proportional representation has been identified by Berkeley anthropologist, John Ogbu (1978). Indigenous minorities, a category that includes most American blacks, and native Americans as well as a sizeable number of Hispanics, were brought into a relationship with the dominant culture through slavery or conquest. In contrast to resource based immigrant minorities (Asian-Americans, Cuban-Hispanics, and Caribbean or African blacks are examples) who commonly perform academically at levels that equal or exceed the majority population; indigenous blacks and Hispanics who reside in segregated inner-city conclaves, and Hispanics and Native Americans who live in rural isolation or on reservations have been socialized over generations into believing that the opportunity structure precludes their participation in higher education. Many indigenous minorities also believe that even if by some miracle they did achieve a college degree, it would make little difference in a society that has historically and sometimes legally kept their status low.

The largest number of potential minority students from indigenous groups can be found among adults who grew up never expecting to go to college and who in consequence may be very underprepared. Their receptivity to education changes as a result of experiences in the military or the work force where they discover that other people no more able than they have better jobs because of higher education. Talented individuals from this indigenous group are

also encouraged by supervisors and have college-like learning experiences where they begin to develop the self-confidence necessary to return to college as an adult. This group constitutes a very promising pool for attaining proportional participation goals in the short run. This third group will require all of the interventions previously discussed for the first generation traditional college-goers but in addition will need:

- class scheduling that takes into account their family and job responsibilities
- catch-up strategies to build basic skills
- special support services such as child care
- financial assistance that is coordinated with social welfare services and available for the longer time periods it will take them to finish - (The new welfare reform act may represent a major breakthrough provided that it does not prejudge this group as capable of only limited training rather than opportunities for baccalaureate access as well).
- a reasonable assurance that there will be jobs available to them where they live when they finish.

This is a high risk group for any college or university to tackle but the pay-offs can be equally high. For the graduates we talked with, getting a degree was a transforming experience for their families as well as for them. Since most continued to live in the same communities as before, their example helped to change the attitudes of their neighbors and co-workers. Unfortunately, many remained in the same jobs they held before attending college or received minor promotions unrelated to their educational achievements. Education is a part of the answer to past discrimination, but it is not the total answer. Communities, businesses, and industry must do their part as well. Despite disappointments in career aspirations, graduates remained positive about their education and optimistic that it would make a difference for their children if not for them.

Two-year colleges have taken major strides in serving this last population as evidenced by the many part-time adults they enroll. But often these adults have no place to go when they finish their first two years because few conveniently located four-year institutions are willing to make the scheduling and service adjustments necessary to enroll them. Worse, four-year schools are sometimes critical of the quality of community college programs, partly because of the number of adults and minorities they serve, and partly because of the adjustments they have made in teaching and learning strategies to ensure that these nontraditional students have a fair opportunity to succeed. Is the message here that no good deed should go unpunished?

Conclusion

The essence of achievement with quality is the assurance that students leave with comparable skills and knowledge from institutions where access and achievement are unrelated to race or ethnicity. As institutions become more diverse in students, faculty, and administrators, their climate changes from a tolerance for diversity to valuing the advantages of a multicultural environment. When institutions achieve the stage where they value rather than tolerate diversity they no longer need special programs or services for any group because they develop the talents of all students they serve. Equally important they know the difference between the preparation students bring with them and the competencies with which they leave.

Quality as traditionally defined relies upon admission standards to produce students capable of coping with the demands of an institutional environment designed around the assumption that future students will resemble their predecessors in preparation, opportunity orientation and mode of college attendance. Colleges and universities operating according to this definition provide quality without success when they waive regular admission requirements for minority students without offering the supporting services essential to achievement. Institutions that provide open access without assessing and correcting academic deficiencies as well as making progress toward proportional minority representation and achievement in all programs provide access without quality.

Quality redefined to accommodate the growing diversity that will characterize America's college going population in the next quarter century emphasizes teaching and support strategies for promoting comparable achievement among a student body selected to ensure proportional representation of all races and ethnic groups.

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